

## ABSTRACT

### SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY: AN OUTCOME EVALUATION OF THE FULTON  
COUNTY, (ATLANTA) GEORGIA CASA PROGRAM

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This study evaluated the efforts of the Fulton County Court Appointed Special Advocate (FCCASA) Program and its effectiveness in permanency planning. Permanency planning refers to efforts to move children through the court system in a timely and efficient manner. Fulton county Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers collaborate with parties who have a legal interest to children involved in deprivation and neglect proceedings. The outcome of permanency is measured by the following outcome indicators: average number of months (in the past year) children in the CASA program are under court jurisdiction; percent of CASA children dismissed from court custody at six, twelve, and eighteen months after being assigned a CASA; and percent of CASA cases that experienced case closure with the court during the past 12 months. A sample of 25 children having a CASA ordered and assigned to their case was compared with a sample of 25 children who had no CASA assigned to their case. A chi-squared test, t-test, and ANOVA were used to interpret the frequency data collected on child outcomes variables related to time spent under court jurisdiction.

The use of the ecological model allows for cases to be looked at individually, while also providing a holistic view of the interconnected and inseparable relationship of which individuals are a part. This scientific and systematic approach provides better insight in to why CASA volunteers are more effective in promoting permanency for children involved in deprivation and neglect proceedings in the Fulton County Juvenile Court. A brief narrative highlights the findings and results of the study. Finally, this evaluation provides implications for social work practice that assess the strengths and weaknesses of having a volunteer program such as Fulton County CASA advocate for abused and neglected children involved in deprivation cases.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY: AN OUTCOME EVALUATION OF THE  
FULTON COUNTY, (ATLANTA) GEORGIA CASA PROGRAM

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

No deprivation decision is reached in a vacuum, and those concerning vulnerable children often stimulate strong emotional responses. Concerned over making decisions about abused and neglected children without sufficient information, a Seattle judge birthed the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. A CASA volunteer is assigned to a child involved in a deprivation proceeding of abuse or neglect. Deprivation proceedings take place when a child is adjudicated deprived, meaning that they are in need of assistance or placement because he or she has no parent, guardian, or custodian responsible for his or her care or supervision, or whose parent, guardian, or custodian is unable to provide the care or supervision and lacks an appropriate alternative child care arrangement (CASA Volunteer Training Curriculum, 2003). The volunteer speaks up for the child's best interests and continues on the case throughout the judicial proceeding in order to ensure that there is permanency in the child's life. The volunteer conducts an independent fact-gathering mission to provide the court with enough information to make a permanency plan for each child involved in the case. The CASA's only job is to speak for the child to assure his or her best interests do not get overlooked while in protective custody and to assist in having the child/children placed in a safe, nurturing, and permanent home as quickly as possible.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Fulton County CASA Program in decreasing the length of time children spend under the jurisdiction of the court.

### Logic Model

The Fulton CASA program seeks to lessen the amount of time children spend under court jurisdiction by using a collaborative approach rooted in the ecological theory. The ecological theory is best known for its view of the inseparable web of relationships that take place in nested environments. Fulton CASA inputs include volunteer recruitment, training, and retention. CASA volunteers complete an extensive pre-service training before being sworn in as an officer of the court. In return, CASA volunteers are expected to engage in activities that support permanent outcomes for the children they represent. The required activities for an active CASA volunteer include working from the ecological model to seek cooperative solutions with collateral contacts such as Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS), parents, relatives, and other agencies by gathering information to ascertain the facts and circumstances surrounding a child's situation in order to develop a permanent plan for the child. CASA volunteers are expected to visit the child or children on their case at least once a month to provide a consistent figure in the child's life and to lay eyes on them ensuring no further abuse or neglect is occurring. Finally, CASA volunteers are required to submit a written report to the court including recommendations based on their investigative findings. In addition to the report, volunteers are expected to attend all court hearings and panel reviews to represent the child's best interest. When these

program inputs are combined with volunteer activities, Fulton CASA's desired outcome is for the child or children to achieve a safe, stable, and permanent home as quickly as possible. It is by this logic model that the Fulton County CASA program operates. This model is consistent with the ecological theory in that it recognizes and works within the complex web of systems present in the child's life. Each intervention focuses on dyadic or small group relationships relevant to the child's optimum development. Figure 1 presents a pictorial representation of Fulton County CASA's Logic Model.

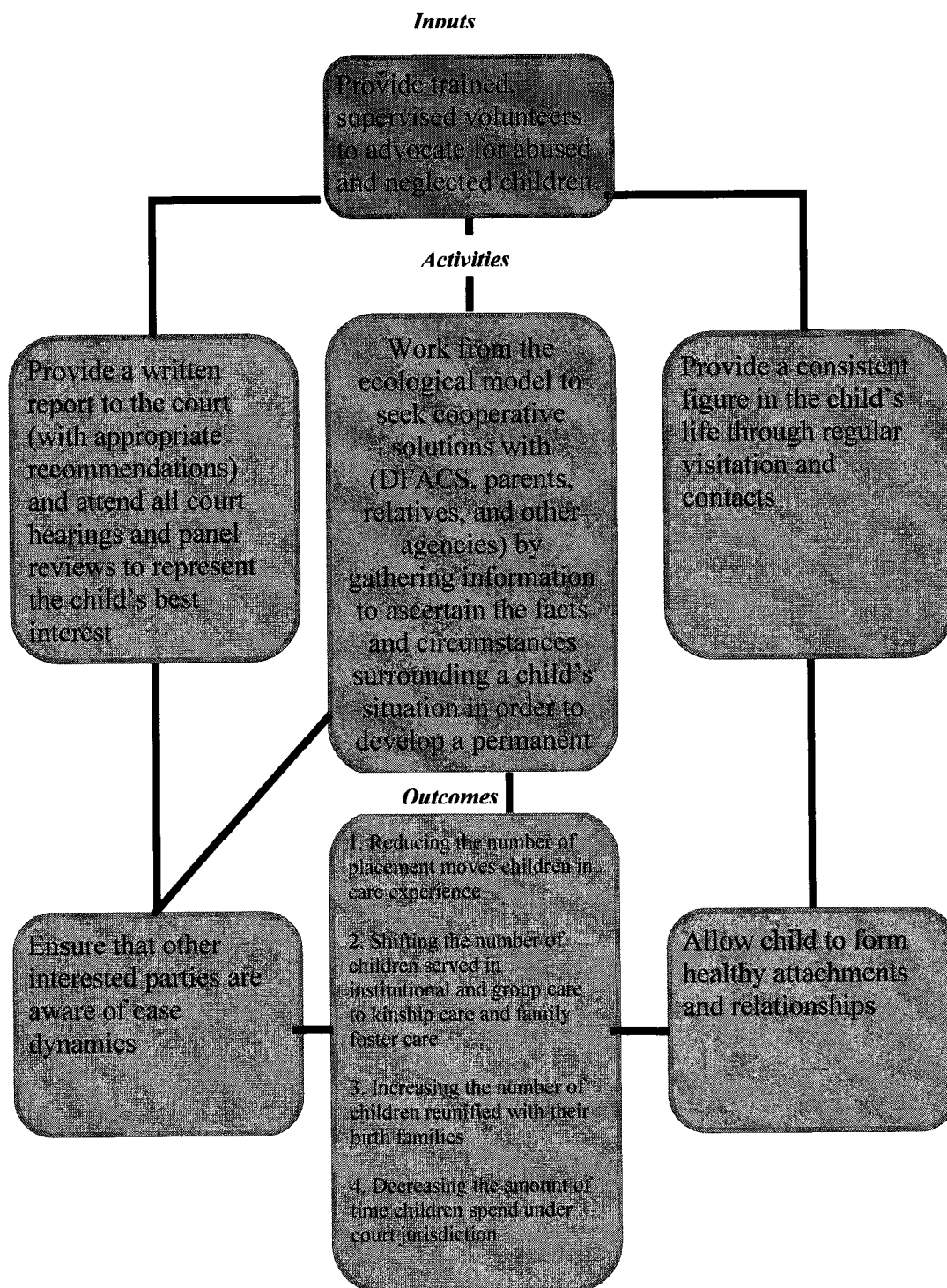


Figure 1. Fulton CASA Logic Model

### Purpose of Evaluation

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the Fulton County CASA Program in reducing the length of time children spend under the jurisdiction of the court. However, other mitigating variables are factored into the data collection method to provide some possible justifications as to why the presence of CASA volunteers lessens the duration of time children spend under the jurisdiction of the court.

### Background of the Issue

The concept of permanency planning began back in the 1970s after research findings revealed a “drift” of children in foster care (Fein & Maluccio, 1992). This drift refers to the situation where children remain in the system for an extended period of time, with no case plans for an eventual reunification. The goal of permanency planning is to alleviate this “drift” and to maintain children in a permanent home to avoid these harmful separations and indeterminate stays (Jennings, McDonald, & Henderson, 1996).

The Child Abuse Prevention Act of 1974 requires states to appoint guardians ad litem to represent children in child protection court proceedings. The primary purpose of this requirement is to provide a reliable, approachable, and personal channel for children to voice their concerns to the court. This child focused movement has been a reaction to the question, “Who best represents the interests of the child in Court?”

(Poertner & Press, 1990). The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 requires the provision of timely assessments and intervention services to the children and families served within the Child Protective Services (CPS) system.

### Statement of the Problem

Each year thousands of children are thrust into court through no fault of their own. Some are victims of violence, psychological torment, and or sexual abuse. Others have been neglected or abandoned by their own parents. Often these children become victims of an overburdened child welfare system. Once these children are placed under court jurisdiction, many are removed from their homes and placed in out-of-home care. These children may bounce around between family foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers, and relative homes. To best protect these children, independent child advocate volunteers are appointed by the court to become the voice for these otherwise voiceless children. These trained volunteers hear the problems and concerns related to each individual case as well as work with the families to achieve permanent placements for the children involved. This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the Fulton County CASA Program in assisting children achieve timely permanency outcomes by reducing the length of time these children spend under the jurisdiction of the court.

## Significance of the Evaluation

This evaluation is significant in that it is the first program evaluation of the Fulton County CASA Program that specifically looks at the effective association volunteers have on the child outcomes of time and permanency. Past evaluations have focused on process goals, program and volunteer activities, and fiscal goals. This evaluation is needed so that Fulton County CASA can set specific client outcome goals. This evaluation is also important in that many stakeholders are now requesting measurement of outcome related data. This evaluation allows Fulton CASA to see where they currently rank in relation to permanency outcomes. This information can be used in current and comprehensive strategic planning. Furthermore, this evaluation will draw attention to any gaps in the current data collection methods of Fulton CASA. Most importantly, this evaluation allows Fulton CASA to appraise whether or not their involvement in deprivation cases has a positive impact on the length of time children spend under the jurisdiction of the courts.

## Overview of Evaluation Proposal

This evaluation sought to determine if CASA children spend less time under the jurisdiction of the court than non-CASA children. The results have implications on funding as well as comprehensive planning. The upcoming chapters of this evaluation are comprised of an extensive review of the literature that summarizes the strengths, weaknesses, and gap in the literature. The ecological theory is used as a theoretical

model to explain the rationale for this study. A step-by-step process of the proposed methodology is given. The expected findings are presented based on existing literature. A conclusion that addresses the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the evaluations is provided. Finally, the implications this evaluation has on social work practice are discussed.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Previous research has been conducted on various aspects of CASA programs. A number of studies have sought to describe the characteristics of CASA volunteers, the training they receive, and their activities. Other research has described the types of services children with CASA volunteers receive and their placements. Included in much of this research are comparisons between children who do and do not have CASA volunteers. This review focuses on the CASA program design, the quality of service in CASA programs, and the effectiveness of CASA programs. This review provides an analysis and summary of the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the literature. Lastly, this literature review applies a theoretical view as to why CASA volunteers may be more effective in promoting permanency for the children they serve. The literature review and conceptual framework combined with the evaluation outcomes collectively provide insight into where Fulton CASA is making progress and to where changes are needed in policy and practice.

## The CASA Program

An increasingly popular program for assisting permanency planning in child abuse and neglect cases involves the use of trained lay volunteers acting as CASAs. The first guardian ad litem (GAL) program for child abuse and neglect cases to use lay volunteers was started in King County (Seattle), Washington in 1977 (Regney, 1985). From this model, the CASA program was created. The purpose of the GAL and CASA programs is to provide children and families with an advocate who has the time and commitment to focus on their case and follow it through from beginning to end, as well as provide the court with an objective opinion on the appropriate services and plan of action for children and families involved in the child welfare system.

The National CASA Association (NCASAA) currently provides oversight to CASA programs across the country. NCASAA has a set of standards to which all CASA programs must adhere (NCASAA Standards Committee, 2003). In 2001, NCCASA adopted a quality assurance system that included plans for a new mandatory self-assessment process (NCASAA Standards Committee, 2003). The national standards cover nearly all aspects of CASA programs, including program governance, program development and implementation, national and state affiliation, human resource and volunteer management, public relations, planning evaluation, and record keeping (NCASA Standards for Programs: Path to Program Excellence, 2003).

Training standards are also included in the national standards. The national training standards require volunteers to complete at least 30 hours pre-service training each year (NCASA Standards Self Assessment Instrument, 2003). It is recommended

that training include the following components: juvenile and family court process, the dynamics of human behavior associated with abuse and neglect, the dynamics of the family, relevant state and federal laws, confidentiality and record keeping practices, child development, child abuse and neglect, permanency planning and resources, community agencies and resources, communication and information gathering, advocacy, cultural awareness, poverty, and identification of personal and institutional bias as it relates to children and families being served (NACASA Standards for Programs: Path to Program Excellence, 2003).

What is missing from the standards is outcome evaluation. Individual CASA programs are only required to report the permanency type achieved when reporting on child outcomes. CASA programs are not required to assess the effectiveness of their interventions. National CASA does an annual evaluation of CASA representation. However, the data collected for this evaluation are not inclusive or representative of all CASA programs given the demographic make-up of each local program and the fact that data are collected from the COMET database which not all CASA programs currently use.

### Quality of CASA

CASA volunteers engage in a wide range of activities. Some of the most common activities include interviewing the child and family, conferencing with school personnel, doctors, attorneys, and other service providers, monitoring the case to ensure court orders are being carried out and that appropriate services are being received,

conducting home evaluations, report writing, and advocating in court which includes making recommendation on placement and services. CASA volunteers may also actively engage in recruitment and training of new volunteers. This is by far not an exhaustive list of the activities CASA volunteers perform. Many CASA volunteers are willing to do whatever it takes to ensure that the child's best interests are made known to the court.

A study by Calkins and Millar (1999) found that CASA volunteers in one program had an average of 97 contacts per case, which included approximately 16 to 17 with children and a similar number with foster parents or other caregivers, 12 to 14 contacts each with natural parents, caseworkers, other system personnel and general phone contacts, and four contacts with other sources (Calkins & Millar, 1999). Weisz and Thai (2003) found that 100 percent of CASA volunteers visit the child before a court hearing, 95 percent talk with other service providers, and 95 percent talk with the caseworker before the hearing. Berliner and Fitzgerald (1998) found that in almost all cases during the investigation phase the CASA or GAL volunteer had contact with the child, the biological parents, the foster parents, the DFACS worker, and other interested parties involved with the case including mental health and other service providers. Although Berliner and Fitzgerald (1998) reported difficulty in obtaining accurate estimates of the amount of time CASA volunteers spent on each case, they found that volunteers reported spending on average twenty nine hours on the investigation phase (with a median of 20 hours) and thirteen hours per month during the remaining duration of the case. Leung (1996) also assessed the quality of CASA services rendered by

breaking down volunteer activities. He reported that CASA volunteers spent approximately ten hours in court activities and nine hours writing reports; eight hours interviewing parents; six hours interviewing the child; four hours interviewing school personnel who had contact with the child; and four hours interviewing foster parents or caretakers per case.

### Effectiveness of CASA

While a great deal of the literature focuses on the quality of services rendered by CASA volunteers, the other bulk of the literature focuses on comparisons between children with and without CASA volunteers. These comparisons focus on key areas including services provided to the children and families, permanency plans, and placement. Few of these studies specifically focus on time as a central measure. (Caulkins and Millar, 1999) evaluated the CASA program goal of finding permanent placements as quickly as possible. They found that more cases resulted in permanency when a CASA volunteer was involved (64.7%) than when there was no CASA volunteer (53%), although this finding was not statistically significant. In the same evaluation, Caulkins and Miller found that cases with CASA involvement were found to have significantly fewer placements ( $M=3.29$ ,  $SD= 2.081$ ) compared to those cases without CASA involvement ( $M=4.55$ ,  $SD= 4.84$ ). Leung (1996) found that children with CASA volunteers tend to be more likely to be reunited with their parents than children without CASA volunteers. Litzelfner (2000) found that children with CASA

volunteers had fewer placements (3.9 on average) than those without CASA volunteers (6.6 on average).

There are however a couple of negative findings about the effectiveness of CASA programs. Leung and Mastrini (1990) evaluated a CASA program in Denver, Colorado, and found that there were no significant differences of time in out-of-home placements between cases assigned a CASA volunteer and cases where a CASA volunteer was not involved. Also, Smith (1992) found that children with CASA volunteers had significantly more foster homes and placements, and were in care longer before reaching permanency than children without a CASA volunteer although case severity was sighted as a weakness of the study in that no test was done to compare homogeneity of groups.

A study by Litzelfelner (2000) compared children coming into care who were and were not assigned a CASA volunteer. The study found that groups differed on the type of deprivation. More children who were assigned a CASA volunteer had been physically and/or sexually abused and neglected, had been neglected only, or had a caregiver with a substance abuse problem. These tended to be the more severe cases. Children without CASA volunteers were more likely to have had physical or sexual abuse only (without neglect). Children with CASA volunteers also had a greater number of siblings in out-of-home care than those without CASA volunteers (Litzelfelner, 2000).

### Analysis of the Literature

One thing that the literature clearly points out is that there are many different variables to consider when evaluating CASA programs. Most of the existing research suggests that CASA programs are effective in helping children receive services and find permanent placements. Duquette and Ramsey (1986) compared a group of trained and untrained lawyers and concluded that the background was not nearly as important as the training received. Trained volunteers appear to be able to help children through the court process at least as effectively, if not more so, than untrained attorneys acting as child advocates.

### Limitations of the Literature

Even with several CASA program evaluations performed, significant gaps still remain in the literature. Caulkins and Millar (1999) note that it is important to develop evaluation measures for CASA programs that can identify which activities of the CASA volunteer promote the achievement of permanency. Litzelfelner (2000) suggests additional outcomes and process variables be measured such as recidivism rates, frequency of court and child welfare case reviews, number of planned versus unplanned moves for children, number of siblings groups placed together, and length of time from petition to adjudication hearings.

Missing from much of this research are evaluations that specifically look at CASA programs that serve majority minority populations. Also missing from this

research is a scientific theory that supports and validates the program goals and objectives of the Fulton County CASA program. This present evaluation sought to replicate previous research that evaluates the effectiveness of CASA in a CASA program that serves over 90% African-American children and makes a major commitment to recruiting and training African-American volunteers. The Fulton County (Atlanta), Georgia CASA program is evaluated to see if the presence of CASA volunteers lessens the length of time children spend under the jurisdiction of the court.

### Conceptual Framework

The ecological model is a systematic way of viewing a person in relation to their environment, in their interconnected and multilayered reality. The ecological model outlines boundaries that provide limits and define parameters (Lowery, Mattaini, & Meyer, 2002). This approach individualizes a case. No person can be understood apart from their environment because no man is an island. The ecological model looks at the inseparable web of relationships between individuals and subsystems (Capra, 1996). This theoretical framework is applicable to this study because child development involves a series of cognitive, physical, emotional, and social changes. According to developmental psychologists, children need warm loving and stable home environments in order to grow and develop in a healthy manner. It is believed that a "child centered," "family-focused," and "culturally responsive" framework for child welfare promotes the best outcomes for children. However, operating from this framework requires time, patience, and commitment at the minimum. As the number of children in foster care

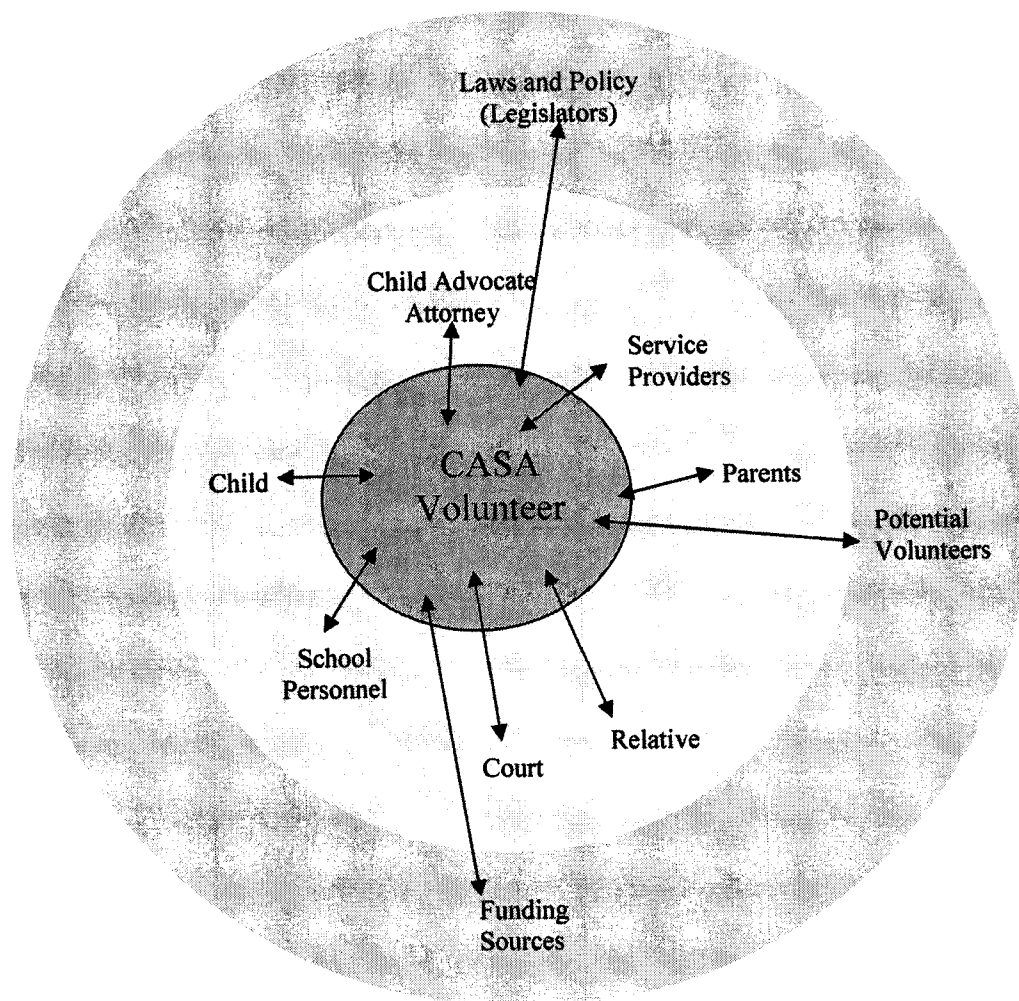


continues to rise and resources and budgets continue to dwindle, child welfare workers find themselves with less time to interact with their clients, a lack of patience for system shortcomings, and a fading commitment. This is where CASA comes in.

Fulton County CASA's are everyday citizens who are able to step up to ensure that deprived children do not fall through the cracks. These volunteers who make up the macro level of a larger subsystem are able to work with the individual child(ren) involved in deprivation cases at the micro level. CASA volunteers also work with other mezzo-level subsystems in the child's life such as school, family, and child protective services. Because CASA volunteers interact with the court, they become aware of laws and policies that act on the children and families with whom they work. CASA volunteers are able to use this knowledge to raise awareness and engage in political advocacy on the macro level. Working from the ecological approach allows Fulton County CASA volunteers to view the larger system of which the children for which they advocate are a part. CASA volunteers are able to view cases in their transactional complexity. This holistic approach allows the CASA volunteer to recognize shortages of financial resources, housing assistance, social support, or substance abuse services. By understanding this reality, CASA volunteers are able to advocate for the services needed for the children and families they work with, thereby equipping them with the needed tools to restabilize their family and achieve permanency options that are in the best interest of the child(ren). Through dialogue with others involved in the child's environment, CASA volunteers are able to narrow down which permanency option compliments the child's individual growth and development. When possible and in the

best interest of the child, CASA volunteers seek reunification with biological parents as a permanent plan. CASA's rely heavily on the strength based approach when seeking reunification and kinship care outcomes. This approach is consistent with the child centered, family focused, and culturally responsive framework. When reunification or kinship care are not possible outcomes, CASA volunteers work diligently to place children in other safe, permanent, and stable homes that are able to offer them a sense of belonging and legal lifetime family ties. It is the goal of CASA to provide a safe and stable permanency outcome for all children involved in deprivation proceedings as quickly as possible.

Using the conceptual framework of the ecological model, it is expected that children assigned a CASA volunteer will spend less time under the jurisdiction of the court compared to children without a CASA volunteer. This rationale is based on the fact that CASA volunteers are able to devote the needed time (others in the child welfare system lack) to understand and assess families from an ecological model. This is enhanced by CASA volunteer's respect for each person's dignity, individuality, and right to self-determination. Figure 2 shows a pictorial illustration of the ecological theory with the CASA volunteer as advocate for a child.



*Figure 2. Conceptual Framework.* Represents the various subsystems CASA volunteers interact with to promote timely permanent outcomes.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This evaluation used a cross-sectional analysis of deprivation case that were opened in the 2003 calendar year and were closed on or before November 1, 2004. A random sample of 25 cases with a CASA volunteer assigned to the case was compared to a random sample of 25 cases with no CASA involvement. Case records were used to obtain information needed to complete case extraction sheets. Outcome indicators were listed to systematically lay-out how the outcome measures were evaluated. Detailed methods of data collection were provided for the data collection method. Finally, a statistical analysis of the collected data was conducted to measure outcomes.

#### Sample

If children cannot be adequately protected in their own home, and they continue to be at risk of abuse and neglect by their parent or caretaker, the court may order temporary removal from the home. There were a total of 3,489 deprivation referrals brought before the Fulton County Juvenile Court in 2003 ( JCATS, 2004). The Fulton County CASA program served approximately 320 of these referrals. Both Fulton CASA and Fulton County Juvenile Court report that African-American males slightly outnumber females when these statistics are broken down by gender. Males on

average account for about 52% of deprivation offenses while females on average account for about 48% of deprivation offenses (Fulton County JCATS, 2004). The most frequently occurring form of deprivation reported by both FCCASA and Fulton County Juvenile Court was neglect. Because neglect is often related to a lack of resources, it is expected that the collaborating role of the CASA volunteer will enable children to connect with missing resources thereby fostering timely permanency outcomes.

Threats to external validity of this evaluation included the ability to generalize the findings to other CASA programs. The demographic make-up of CASA volunteers in Fulton County may not be analogous with other CASA programs and volunteer activities may differ in other CASA programs. For example, not all CASA programs conduct home evaluations. The lack of this service by volunteers has the potential to exhaust valuable time in that these programs are dependent on other services providers. Fulton CASA volunteers conduct home evaluations which may be a factor in shortening the length of time children spend under court jurisdiction. This may be especially true in private deprivation cases where the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) is not involved. Other personal volunteer characteristics that may affect the ability to generalize the results include the race, socioeconomic status, level of education, and age of volunteers.

### Measure

This study evaluated the average number of months children in the Fulton County CASA program were under court jurisdiction. Benchmark indicators used to evaluate this measure included the percent of CASA children dismissed from court custody at six, twelve, and eighteen months after being assigned a CASA volunteer, and the percent of Fulton CASA cases that experienced case closure with the court during the past year. Table 1 provides a framework for outcome measurement.

Table 1

*Outcome Measurement Framework for Fulton CASA*

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Indicator(s)</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>
Length of time spent under court jurisdiction	Average # of months children in CASA program were under court jurisdiction	Case Files	Record data on case extraction form
	% of CASA children dismissed from court at 6, 12, & 18 months after being assigned a CASA	Case Files	Record data on case extraction form
	% of CASA cases that closed in past 12 months	Case Files	Record data on case extraction form

<b>Influencing Factor</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>
Number of hearings	Case Files	Record data on case extraction form
Number of continuances	Case Files	Record data on case extraction form
Number of placement moves	Case Files	Record data on case extraction form

**Design**

This evaluation followed a quasi-experimental design, with an experimental group compared with a comparison group to determine the level of difference the Fulton County CASA program makes in the amount of time children with a CASA volunteer spend under the jurisdiction of the court compared to children without a CASA. Both examined groups were comprised using random selection. This design

accounted for extraneous variables by equalizing both groups. The major threats to internal validity were controlled by the inclusion of a control group.

### Procedures

Data collection took place throughout the months of October and November 2004. A compiled list of opened CASA cases for the calendar year 2003 was collected from the CASA case log book. The file numbers from each case were recorded and numbered. Every eighth case was circled and selected to be a part of the study, until a total of 25 cases have been identified. The evaluator then requested that each advocacy coordinator make available the requested case files. The evaluator sat with each coordinator and completed the case extraction form recording the file number of the case in the upper left hand corner and the corresponding code number in the right corner of the form. This time was also used to answer and clear up any questions raised by the advocacy coordinator and the evaluator. Cases in which the deprivation complaint were dismissed within three months of CASA being assigned were omitted. In these instances, the evaluator went back to the compiled list of cases and selected the next eighth case. For the comparison group, the evaluator requested a compiled list of 100 randomly selected deprivation cases that were opened and adjudicated deprived in the calendar year 2003. These case numbers were cross referenced with the case numbers of CASA cases. All CASA cases that appeared on the sample of adjudicated deprived list provided by the researcher/evaluator of Fulton County Juvenile Court were crossed out. The remaining cases on the Fulton County Juvenile Court list were



numbered. The evaluator then circled every eighth case on the juvenile court list until a sample of 25 was compiled. The compiled list of case numbers for the control group was then used to extract needed information from Juvenile Court Automated Tracking System (JCATS). The case extraction form served as a guide for what data to collect on each case. Once each case extraction sheet was completed the coded number was entered in the upper right hand corner of the case extraction form and the corresponding file number was entered in the upper left hand corner. Once the two sample groups were identified, cases were compared to ensure that CASA and non CASA groups were equivalent to one another. This method ensured that should the evaluator need to return to a particular case, the compiled list would be used to obtain the corresponding file number for the case. Once all the cases had been reviewed and all case extraction sheets were completed, the raw data was coded and input into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analyses. Variables were analyzed to examine child outcomes.

### Statistical Analysis

The three outcome measures: average number of months CASA children spend under the jurisdiction of the court, percent of CASA children dismissed at six, twelve, and eighteen months after being assigned a CASA volunteer, and percent of CASA cases closed by Fulton County Juvenile Court were compared with the control group and analyzed using a chi-square tests, cross tabulations, and one way ANOVA test to measure levels of difference. Gender and ethnicity of both groups were analyzed using

chi-square analyses. Other mitigating variables that influence timely permanency and were related to the conceptual framework were analyzed also. These variables included number of continuances and the type of permanency achieved. Number of placement moves could not be measured due to insufficient data.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the result of this evaluation. Demographic information is provided for the sample this evaluation was conducted on. The results of the statistical analysis are presented along with an interpretation of the findings. The results from this evaluation show that the presence of a Fulton County CASA volunteer does not significantly reduce the length of time children spent under the jurisdiction of the court.

#### Demographics

The total sample for this evaluation consisted of 50 participants (25 CASA cases and 25 non-CASA cases). Gender was examined using a cross tabulation analyses and the CASA group sampled was found to be 52% (13) male and 48% (12) female while the non CASA group sampled was found to be 48% (12) male and 52% (13) female. To examine ethnicity the sample was divided into four groups representing persons of European descent (caucasian), African descent (black), Hispanic descent (hispanic), and persons from other groups. A cross tabulation analyses was used to determine if there was a disproportionate representation within groups. The CASA group sampled was found to consist of 92% (23) people of African descent and the non-CASA group sampled was also found to consist of 92% (23) people of African descent. The mean

age for the total sample (n=50) was found to be 9.94 with a standard deviation of 5.06.

Type of deprivation was examined and revealed that 88 % (22) of CASA cases stemmed from neglect, 8.3% (2) stemmed from sexual abuse, 4.2% (1) stemmed from physical abuse and 96% (24) of non-CASA case stemmed from neglect with 4% (1) stemming from physical abuse. Table 2 shows a cross tabulation of sample case demographics.

Table 2

*Cross Tabulation of Sample Case Demographics*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	
<i>CASA Case</i>	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25 (100%)	
<i>Non-CASA Case</i>	12 (48%)	13 (52%)	25 (100%)	
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>European Descent</b>	<b>African Descent</b>	<b>Hispanic Descent</b>	<b>Other Descent</b>
<i>CASA Case</i>	0	23 (92%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
<i>Non-CASA Case</i>	1 (4%)	23 (92%)	1 (4%)	0
<b>Type of Deprivation</b>	<b>Physical Abuse</b>	<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	<b>Neglect</b>	<b>Other</b>
<i>CASA Cases</i>	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	23 (88%)	0
<i>Non-CASA Case</i>	1 (4%)	0	24 (96%)	0

### Length of Time Spent Under Jurisdiction of Court

The ultimate goal of the CASA program is to ensure that children achieve safe, permanent, and stable homes as quickly as possible. To discover whether cases with CASA services reduced the length of time children spent in care before being permanently placed, cases receiving CASA services ( $n=25$ ) were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found ( $F(1, 43) = .625, p > .05$ ). Cases with a CASA volunteer did not differ significantly in the length of time spent under the jurisdiction of the court when compared with non-CASA cases. Figure 3 uses a bar chart to display the average length of time spent under the jurisdiction of the court.

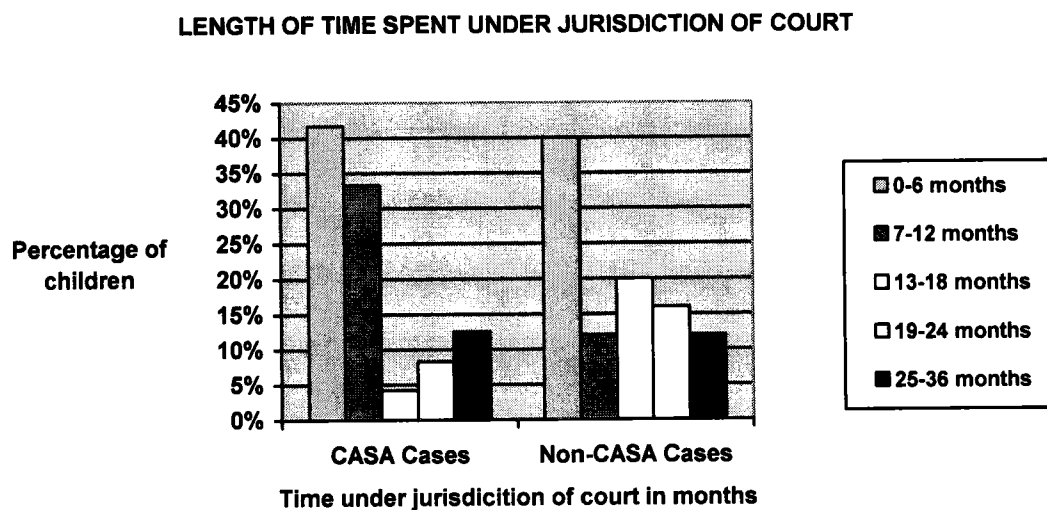


Figure 3. Analyzed data of evaluation question.

### Conceptual Framework Variables

CASA volunteers interact with various parties involved in child deprivation proceedings. Because CASA volunteers are often the only consistent professional assigned to the child's case, they are often the only ones who are aware when caseworkers, child advocate attorneys, child placements, court dates, and contact information for vested parties change. Based on the ecological model and the logic model of the Fulton County CASA program, it is expected that CASA volunteers promote timely permanence by ensuring that other interested parties are aware of case dynamics and hearings thereby reducing the number of continuances which delay permanency outcomes. To assess whether or not the conceptual framework of the ecological model could be applied to this variable, the number of continuances on cases with a CASA volunteer was compared to the number of continuances on cases without a CASA volunteer. A chi-square analyses was conducted and found that 100% (25) of CASA cases had five or less continuances and only 64% (16) of non-CASA cases had five or less continuances. This difference approached, but did not achieve the .05 level of statistical significance ( $\chi^2(4, 40) = p > .05$ ).

Cases that had achieved permanency were also examined using a cross table analyses. The results showed that 88% (22) of CASA cases and that only 64% (16) of non-CASA cases had achieved permanency at the time of the evaluation. Of those that achieved permanency, 58% (14) of CASA cases closed with reunification with at least one biological parent and 25% (6) of CASA cases closed with a relative placement. Only 32% of non-CASA cases closed with reunification with at least one biological

parent and only 8% (2) ended with a relative placement. Table 3 presents the results of three evaluation questions examined.

Table 3

*Results of Evaluation Questions*

<b>Examined Outcome</b>	<b>Analyzed Results</b>	
Average # of months children in CASA program were under court jurisdiction (N=25)	7-12 months	
% of CASA children dismissed from court at 6, 12, & 18 months because permanency was achieved after being assigned a CASA (N=20)	6 months	41 % (10)
	12 months	34 % (9)
	18 months	4.2 % (1)
% of CASA cases that closed in past 12 months because permanency was achieved (N=22)	88 % (22)	

Summary

Presented in this chapter were the findings of this evaluation. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the presence of a CASA volunteer did not statistically significantly reduce the length of time children involved in deprivation proceedings spend under the jurisdiction of the court. The results of this evaluation show that CASA volunteers are effective in reducing the number of continuances in deprivation proceedings. The results also show that cases that receive CASA volunteer services achieved the preferred permanency outcomes at a higher rate than children who did not receive these services. The chapters that follow discuss the findings presented and concludes the evaluation with implications for social work practice.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter examines the outcomes of the evaluation and provides discussions relevant to the findings. It highlights how the analyzed data support the goals and objectives of the Fulton County CASA program. Limitations of the evaluation are provided along with suggested research of future practices. Finally, brief recommendations for program improvement are included.

The findings from this evaluation add to the body of literature supporting the valuable work done by CASA programs. The results of this study were consistent with previous research. Caulkins and Millar 1999 evaluated the CASA program goal of finding permanent placements as quickly as possible. They found that more cases resulted in permanency when a CASA volunteer was involved (64.7%) than when there was no CASA volunteer. Leung (1996) found that children with CASA volunteers tended to be more likely to be reunited with their parents than children without CASA volunteers. The findings of this evaluation not only supports the findings of previous research but uses a scientific theory to justify the results thus adding new knowledge to this body of literature.

The results of this evaluation also support the goals and objectives of the Fulton County CASA program. The Fulton County CASA program is aware that over 90% of



the children they serve are of African descent. Committed to making sure that the needs of abused and neglected children do not go unnoticed or forgotten, the Fulton County CASA program operates under the African philosophy that it takes a village to raise a child. The program makes a conscience effort to recruit, train, and retain volunteers that reflect the population they serve. This holistic approach allows the CASA volunteer to recognize shortages of financial resources, housing assistance, social support, or substance abuse services. By understanding this reality, CASA volunteers are able to advocate for the services needed for the children and families they work with, thereby equipping them with the needed tools to restabilize their family and achieving permanency options that are in the best interest of the child (ren). Reducing the number of continuances and ensuring that children served by CASA volunteers receive the top two preferred permanency outcomes are a few ways this evaluation support the goals and objectives of the Fulton County CASA program.

Finally, this evaluation speaks volumes to the efficacy of the CASA programs outcomes by showing that 79% (19) of cases receiving CASA services comply with The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) which limits the length of time abused or neglected children should be in care to between 12 and 18 months. While the services provided by CASA volunteers does appear to have a positive impact in reducing the length of time children spend under the jurisdiction, there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that 100% of children receiving CASA services meet federal and state guidelines.

### Limitations of the Evaluation

There are several limitations to this evaluation that should be taken into consideration. One limitation is the small sample population used. Although the evaluation showed positive outcomes for children served by CASA volunteers, the sample cannot be generalized to all other CASA programs. A larger sample may provide different results.

Another limitation to this study is that it did not examine the length of time siblings of children served by CASA volunteers spend under the jurisdiction of the court. CASA volunteers are not always appointed to each sibling in a case. It is possible that siblings experience far different results.

This study was not able to examine the affects CASA volunteers have on both planned and unplanned placement moves due to insufficient case records. The type of permanency sought could not be adequately examined and compared to the type of permanency achieved due to insufficient case records.

Finally, no casual relationship could be determined from this study because by design and statistical analysis it only correlated association. Volunteer activities would need to be tracked and measured to see what activities performed by CASA volunteers cause positive outcomes.

### Suggested Research for Future Practice

Future outcome evaluations should examine the recidivism rates (re-abuse) of children receiving CASA services and those that do not receive CASA services. To assess the long term outcomes of CASA services, a longitudinal study that tracks whether children receiving CASA services have future dispositions of delinquency charges should be examined. Examining which volunteer activities have the greatest impact on reducing the length of time children spend under the jurisdiction of the court and promote timely permanency outcomes may better help the Fulton County CASA program direct resources.

### Recommendations for Program Enhancement

While the research shows that the Fulton County CASA program is doing a good job at meeting program goals and objectives, it also revealed areas for program improvement. Case files were not consistent among program staff. Advocacy coordinators were able to provide many of the case goals and dynamics, although they were not all documented in cases files. There was no clear service plan in place that outlined the type of permanency sought. There was no measure of the number of planned and unplanned placements of children served because at the time this evaluation was completed, the number of placement moves experienced by children in care with or without CASA services were not being tracked. Developing a standardized service plan form that includes intake (process) and exit (outcome) data would assist

volunteers and program staff in identifying primary services planned for the family and individual child. This form should also include an individualized presumptive order of permanency plans.

## CHAPTER VI

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The over-representation of children of color in the foster care system is further highlighted through the demographics the sample is drawn from. On the contrary, consistent with the Afro-centric perspective, assessing children involved in these cases are paramount in transcending the conventional pathological views that blacks, poor, and oppressed people experience social dysfunctioning primarily due to internal deficits and character disorders. As agents of change, social workers, particularly those engaged in child and family practice can use the findings of this evaluation to engage in advocacy. Social workers can use the expert knowledge they have in understanding human system interactions to speak out and take an informed position on issues relating to child welfare. Social workers should also be compelled by these findings to advocate for policy change and implementation where they recognize how structures inherent in the system such as caseload size and dwindling budgets interfere with the total well-being of the children the system was designed to protect. Furthermore, this evaluation serves as a catalyst to begin collaboration between bureaucratic systems and community resources bridging the gap between the public and private sector. With the social worker functioning as teacher-consultant and a collaboration of private-public resources, the social work problem solving method can be used to plan and organize

innovative delivery systems within the social welfare system and impart knowledge and skills for leadership development so that oppressed families of social welfare services become their own decision makers, problem solvers and advocates (consistent with the social work value of self-determination) using their strengths, uniqueness, talents, and creative cores to maintain cultural integrity.

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT

From October 1, 2004 to November 30, 2004, research evaluation will be conducted on outcome measures related to the Fulton CASA Program. The evaluation will be conducted by Felicia Tuggle a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student at Clark Atlanta University's Whitney M. Young Jr. School of Social Work. The objective of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness the Fulton County CASA Program has on reducing the time children spend under the jurisdiction of the court. The evaluation will involve a review of case records for deprivation cases receiving CASA services for the Calendar year of 2003. Results from the evaluation will be used in the strategic planning of the Fulton County CASA Program.

This evaluation poses no potential risk to any of the children or families involved in the reviewed deprivation cases. Information obtained will be collected and analyzed in a way that will maintain individual confidentiality. Upon completion of the evaluation, stakeholders may request a copy of the results by contacting the Office of Graduate Studies at Clark Atlanta University.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Fulton CASA Executive Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Evaluator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***\*\*\*Please sign and date two copies of this agreement and keep one copy for your records***

## APPENDIX B

### CASE EXTRACTION FORM

<b>Last Name:</b> _____  <b>DOB/Age:</b> _____  <b>Gender:</b> _____  <b>Ethnicity:</b> _____		<b>Type of Deprivation</b>						<b>Permanent Plan</b>	
		Physical Abuse						Reunification	
								Adoption	
								Relative Placement	
		Sexual Abuse						Independent Living	
								Long Term Foster Care	
		Emotional Abuse						Emancipation	
								Transfer to YDC	
Neglect						Runaway			
Other (specify)						Death			
<b>Date CASA ordered</b>	<b>Date CASA assigned</b>	<b>Length of CASA assignment in months</b>							
		0-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-36	<b>Same CASA</b>		
							Yes	No	
<b>Type of Hearing CASA ordered at</b>		<b>Child's length of time in foster care system</b>							
		0-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-36			
<b>Length from time CASA ordered to time CASA assigned</b>		<b>Number of hearings</b>							
<b>Number of Child Advocates</b> _____  <b>Number of Case Workers</b> _____		<b>Number of continuances</b>							
		<b>Number of placement moves</b>							



## Appendix B (Continued)

## Case Extraction Form (Continued)

<i>Has Permanency been achieved</i>		<i>Type of permanency achieved</i>
<i>YES</i>	<i>NO</i>	

**Evaluator Comments:**

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